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The chaotic condition of college remedial reading courses is criticized in this speech, with major emphasis placed on the inadequacy of the "English-teacher-turned-reading-teacher" in coping with the drastic ability and attitudinal problems of the remedial reading student. An outline of six issues confronting colleges and junior colleges pinpoints deficiencies in existing programs. Suggestions for improvement stress (1) the need for teachers trained in reading theory and teaching methodology, and (2) systematic programing which is tailored to individual strengths and weaknesses. (CW)

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READING: EMERGING ISSUES IN THE TWO-YEAR COLLEGES

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(What follows is a condensation of a speech presented to the Annual Convention of the National Council of Teachers of English in Honolulu, November, 1967.)

English teachers, of whom I am one, naturally think of the reading of literature as a major area of their competence. But the remarks which follow here are on the subject of reading courses now commonly provided by community colleges for those who lack basic reading skills adequate to cope with college programs, whether such courses are labeled -

Remedial Reading	Directed Reading
Developmental Reading	Reading Skills
Reading Improvement	Effective Reading
Power Reading	Basic Reading
Reading Techniques	Reading Clinic

just to mention a few of the course titles from the catalogs. The very variety suggests some of the chaos in the curriculum -- or at best that the nomenclature is nothing that communicates a commonly understood body of subject matter. Compare how clearly we understand each other when we say, "American Literature, first semester."

It is ironical that I talk to you about what I will call, for simplicity's sake, remedial reading at the college level, when I am a college English teacher with minimum training as a reading specialist, and yet it is that very combination that peculiarly qualifies me to talk on this subject.

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It is not only the English instructors whose wails of "They can't read" echo down our corridors, but the complaints of frustrated teachers in all divisions, and not least from the vocational and technical areas. Certainly this point is too well recognized to belabor.

And who is a more natural choice for instructing these poor readers than English teachers themselves? In many ways they seem beautifully equipped: they have excellent vocabularies; they know books and literature; they are enthusiasts about the pleasures of reading; they understand not only word structure and sentence structure, but are expert on the finer points; they recognize allusions, paradoxes, and fallacies; they are familiar with semantics, euphemism, morpheme; they have met exegesis and etymology. In short, they know how to read. I think without question English instructors are the most talented people linguistically on any campus. What is more logical than that they conduct the course work for the handicapped readers?

I must come to a specific example, and I think my own campus is a good one --a big school (9000 day students and 3000 at night), an old school (1913), a suburban school south of Los Angeles, overwhelmingly white middle-class, fed by school districts that are rated as superior, in a community that is proud of its schools. A member of our psychology department last year administered the California Reading Test to a sizeable sample of our students and concluded that there were approximately 1000 students on our campus reading at the 9th grade level or below. Such atudents have reading

skills more appropriate for junior high school materials than for junior college work. In the open-door junior colleges such as those in California, this high proportion of poor readers has often been confirmed by testing. In junior colleges which draw from working-class areas or from pockets of minority groups, there is an even higher percentage of students who are enrolled who have reading skills appropriate to elementary school levels.

I believe that the lack of reading ability on the part of many students is so appalling that many teachers refuse to face the fact that it is as poor as it is; but they adjust their teaching to oral and visual presentations which actually make it possible for a handicapped reader to complete courses with very little reliance on contact with the printed word.

English teachers are frequently asked to take classes in remedial reading. So the English-teacher-turned-reading-teacher reads the manuals on kit materials, becomes an over-the-weekend expert on eye fixations, regressions, and subvocalization, teaches SQ3R, uses the tachistoscope and other hardware available with small idea of what he is doing, assigns reading for pleasure, and is cheerfully supportive and encouraging because he knows that motivation is extremely important. And it's so easy! A few of the students say the course has helped them very much. The improvement in reading rate scores is quite encouraging by the time the Triggs Diagnostic Survey is given for the third time, even if there does not seem to be much improvement in comprehension or vocabulary. (It must be obvious that this hypothetical English teacher is a mask for my own experience.)

When English teachers turn seriously to preparing for teaching remedial reading by taking courses, attending conferences, and examining the research in the field, they discover that the specialist in reading (the kind of remedial reading which needs to be taught in his classes) needs a body of knowledge at his command which is quite outside the ken of professional preparation of college English teachers.

For instance, in the professional preparation of a credentialed English teacher, where does he learn the diagnostic skills upon which to base an effective remedial reading program for an individual or for a group? Is he trained in psychological testing? Does he know the appropriate tests for components of reading skill? Can he screen for visual defects? Can he interpret the results? Is he familiar with the research which must enlighten his interpretation? Can he validly test the progress of his students?

Has a college English teacher a knowledge of how reading is taught and learned in the primary grades? Does he know how the components of reading skill and the options available in remediation? Does he know the range of materials for the range of needs? Does he know the equipment and its limitations, the software and programs that may appropriately be used for needs ranging from fourth grade level to college level in such components of reading skill as phonics, vocabulary, word recognition, phrase perception, etc?

I salute with profound respect the many English instructors who have added a second professional career by successfully absorbing a vast new body of specialized knowledge.

With that background, I would like to identify six very live issues related to teaching remedial reading in the two-year colleges.

ISSUE I: Will English departments claim or accept the responsibility for an effective program of training reading skills on the campus -- a program appropriate to the needs of the students of that campus? It is not that the English Department is the only department that can do the job, or should do it, or can even best do it; yet I believe that in larger schools, particularly, the support of the English department is needed. A reading skills center may be administered and supervised by psychology departments or independent units, and some of the best of them are, but if effective programs are not already established, it is peculiarly the province of English Departments to see that they are.

ISSUE II: Where English teachers are used as remedial reading teachers, will English faculties recognize that teaching courses in remedial reading requires more highly specialized training than any other course offered by the department? There is a ready analogy here to practice of some high schools in assigning any teacher with a free period to an English class. The false assumption of recent years that any teacher could teach English has been replaced by the equally false assumption that any teacher (especially an English teacher) is equipped to teach remedial reading. The reading field has its own theory, methods, techniques, literature, research -- and these are not readily learned "on the side" by teachers who are at the same time carrying a heavy load of composition courses.

ISSUE III: Will the two-year colleges recognize that there are very few people trained to teach remedial reading at the college and adult level, and that there must be an investment in in-service training, and also subsidy for training of reading specialists at the college level. Federal programs have recognized an acute shortage of reading specialists at the elementary school level, but very little is being done about the need at the college level.

ISSUE IV: Will the two-year colleges recognize that the proliferation of private, commercial reading schools is an indictment of the job that the schools are doing in teaching reading? There is no comparable burgeoning of private schools for remediation of math or science or history; the private businesses are in reading because that is where the need is. In so basic an educational process as teaching reading, the community has a right to expect an answer that is better than the gilded promises of commercial ventures.

ISSUE V: Will the two-year colleges recognize that professional associations of reading teachers, such as the new Western College Reading Association organized last year, set as their first purpose the defining of minimum professional preparation for reading instructors? It will naturally follow, as the day follows night, that within a few years the qualifications of instructors in remedial reading will be a matter of concern for accrediting teams.

ISSUE VI: The last issue is a question of fact-facing in curriculum and involves far-reaching changes. Will we recognize that students

who are seriously deficient in reading skills can rarely achieve much in one semester, meeting for two or three times a week. Consistent daily activities relevant to the student's needs are important. The most successful programs that I know of provide for daily contact, and also make possible the continuation of the student through two, three, or four semesters. Such 5-hour-a-week scheduling is expensive in teacher time as well as space and equipment. Yet such a program is not as expensive as many we operate to serve far fewer students in far less crucial ways.

All of the above issues could be subsumed under one proposition, which is that effective teaching of basic reading skills is one of the major, if not the major, unmet need on many of our two-year campuses. Fortunately, many two-year schools are facing the problem, are learning the job that can be done, and are beginning to measure their success in terms not only of their own testing instruments but in prestige of their courses, in reduction of the number of dropouts, in higher rates of success in other school subjects, and in that wonderful thing called "getting off probation."

I consider myself an outstanding authority in the area of how an English teacher can make a poor reading teacher. If there are mistakes I did not make, it was only because the semester wasn't long enough. I assumed that the very weakest students could learn to read better by reading articles about how to read better. I thought they could do useful exercises at home. I thought that students with verbal scores so low that our tests didn't measure

them could improve their reading by devices to increase their speed. I consistently gave work to students of a nature which merely reinforced their long-established sense of frustration and failure. Such procedures do eventually teach the teacher, but at the student's expense.

We undertook a series of research investigations on our student population, and especially the 300 students enrolled in remedial reading classes, using a wide range of tests as well as the services of specialists and consultants. And we discovered for ourselves what is already well-established; that the profiles of individual students in a class of handicapped readers vary so much from each other in strengths and weaknesses, that only a program which is individualized and systematic can hope to have much success.

To some extent -- no one knows for sure how far -- at the college level and short of a clinic situation, we can at least partially diagnose and plan for individualized programs of activities. It is a fascinating field; there is pioneering to be done and a world to be won.

It is very difficult, I think, for us as English teachers to see the world through the eyes of nonreaders. We book-lovers find ourselves dealing with students who don't <u>like</u> to read. None of us likes to do things that we're unsuccessful in and that make us feel like failures. I daresay that if we were asked to do assorted math problems regularly over a period of years, and all the time we understood how to do addition and subtraction, but not multiplication and division, we'd develop an aversion for math, and, in some cases think poorly of ourselves.

This same type of thing happens with many of our poor readers, for on the whole they are not stupid people; by and large they are intelligent, problem-solving humans, with an admirable courage for even venturing onto a college campus. And naturally they have all kinds of self-protective devices and adjustive psychological mechanisms to make their situations tolerable -- because it <u>is</u> intolerable to embark on a college career without a reasonable competence in reading.

In conclusion, let me illustrate from responses from 100 students from our reading classes who were asked to write on how they thought it had happened that their own reading skills were somehow blocked, or lost, so that they now have an undeveloped reading potential. In our responses, more than half of the students explicitly identified reading as an activity from which no pleasure can be expected. Here are a few quotations:

> "I guess my biggest problem is that it takes too long and it seems as if it is fighting against me when I read."
>
> "The unpleasantness of words made me turn to other things."
>
> "Every time I read I get bored."
>
> "I find it very easy to lose interest because I read too slow. I get mad at myself and give it up altogether."
>
> "Not knowing the correct methods or how to read can disturb a person."

This last comment is from a charming young lady, a student leader. "Not knowing how to read can disturb a person." We also are disturbed, because we English teachers know better than anyone that the limits of one's language set the limits to his world.